

The W.A.N.D.

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Westchester Atari News Digest

SEPTEMBER 1987

from the EDITOR

by Rolly Herman

Different Content

This month's issue of The W.A.N.D. contains articles that are not the usual assortment of 8-bit news, reviews, software and hardware hints, and type-in programs. Our club is still composed of predominantly 8-bit users and The W.A.N.D. is still committed to support the 8-bit machines. However, the question keeps coming up, "should we upgrade to the ST or the newer Mega machines?". The answer seems to be, yes and no, depending upon the tasks to be done and the needs of the user. Therefore, I have included the articles from those who have used both 8-bit and ST machines with their opinions and recommendations, so that each of us can make his or her own decision. I have also included the articles on the IBM emulator "pc-ditto". This seems to be the answer for those people who work on IBM machines at work and wish to be able to use the same programs and data at home on an ST machine. There are 5.25" floppy drives available now for the ST machines which will work with IBM data and with IBM programs using "pc-ditto".

Poor Meeting Attendance

The turnout at our meetings has been rather poor. There are probably many reasons why people cannot or do not attend our meetings. However, I think that there are at least three main reasons that deserve comment, as follows:

1. Lack of interesting computer demonstrations. Our members do not volunteer to put on demos, and, therefore, the evening's program is often a last minute "thrown together hodge podge" that is usually poorly prepared, and uninteresting. It does not seem possible that among our group, no one can show how to play a game, or work a new (or old) program, or demonstrate how a piece of hardware works.

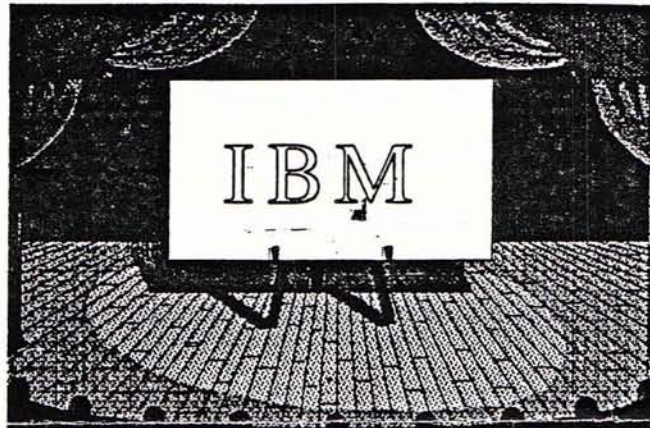
2. Bickering and petty squabbles during what is supposed to be a quick routine business meeting. Some of our members seem to delight in wasting time with all sorts of minor complaints, and enjoy using the club as a forum to vent their frustrations. A few misguided individuals have the mistaken

idea that because they have paid their dues, they have the right to disrupt the meetings with whatever is on their minds, and to argue and harangue ad infinitum. The purpose of the business meeting is to VERY BRIEFLY discuss and vote on any matters that cannot be handled by the executive committee. Minor details should be brought to the attention of the officers either before or after the meeting so that they can be taken care of during executive session. I am sure that the rest of the members that do attend are bored and disgusted with these unnecessary delays and ludicrous arguments. I would hope that in the future, our president would table any such discussions, so that we may all get on with topics relating to our computers.

3. No public domain software. Our librarian has embarked on a new policy. He will no longer bring the library disks to the meetings. He announced at the last meeting that anyone that wants copies of our library public domain software must come to his home. There they may look through the library and pick out what they want. This makes it very easy and convenient for the librarian, and some of his friends, but perhaps not so easy for all of the other members. It also removes one of the incentives for attending a meeting. The librarian is supposed to prepare a list of the public domain software and this list is to be regularly updated and brought to every meeting. This way each member may look through the list and place his order, which would be delivered at the subsequent meeting. This was one of the inducements to come to meetings. It has also been suggested that the librarian should regularly demo some of the newly prepared library disks at the meetings, so that the members may have an idea as to what the programs are like. (It may be advisable also to demonstrate some of the older programs for the benefit of the newer members.) With the librarian's new system, the inducement to come to the meetings is gone. I recommend that the library be handled as had been done in the past, with proper lists, demos, and disks ordered and purchased at the meetings.

To sum it up, would you attend a meeting that had no decent demos, lots of bickering, and no public domain software? I think, perhaps not. So let's all get together and solve these problems in a constructive manner.<>

IBM Programs?



On an ST?

by John P. Silva

My partner and I have been interested in emulators for the ST for a long time. In fact, some of you know my partner as "Mr. ROM". Well, another emulator has arrived for the ST: PC-ditto from Avalon Hill Software. PC-ditto makes your 520 or 1040ST look like an IBM PC XT with a color graphics adapter (or a mono graphics adapter if you have a mono screen). This isn't anything like the previous IBM emulator, MS-EM from Paradox; PC-ditto worked with 100% of the software we tested, and ran most software relatively fast (although still slower than a straight IBM PC).

After we purchased the program, we discovered that it would read IBM disks directly if a suitable IBM 5.25" disk drive could be connected to the ST. Since my partner had several IBM floppy drives, we decided to try connecting it to the ST. First we made a cable to connect the ST to the drive according to data published in various ST reference works and data books on the floppy drives. We then decided to try an 80 track 1.2MB drive as the first "guinea pig". After considerable fiddling around with the jumpers, we were finally rewarded with something approaching functionality. This type of drive was able to format to 720K in atari mode, but we were only able to format it 360K in IBM mode. This is because PC-ditto only knows about 360K drives (we didn't know this at the time). It would read disks formatted on the IBM, but it wasn't reliable. We next tried a 360K IBM floppy drive. This drive didn't work at all. We tried one more 360K drive from a different manufacturer. This drive functioned perfectly in IBM mode. However, formatting it in Atari mode proved to be impossible.

After much more fiddling, we determined that disks formatted by the IBM would read and write perfectly on the Atari in IBM mode (and in Atari mode as we later discovered). However, disks formatted on the Atari in IBM mode wouldn't read on the IBM without the addition of a special driver which is provided on the PC-ditto master disk. With this driver installed in the CONFIG.SYS file on the IBM, it would read Atari disks just fine. The most surprising result of all was that in Atari mode, a disk formatted on the IBM would read and write perfectly. This makes possible data transfer between Atari software and IBM software, simply by taking a disk from one machine to the other!

My partner and I decided to turn the results of our fiddling into a marketable product, so we created Hayward Computer to produce our line of disk drives. We are currently offering a 360K 5.25" disk drive which has its own power supply and will plug right into the ST for \$199. We also offer this unit in kit form for \$175 (\$150 for unit less power supply; this is intended for those who want to use their existing Atari disk drive supply), and for those die-hard hackers, the cable alone and construction plans for \$20. We are planning to introduce a line of 3.5" disk drives, and a combination 3.5"/5.25" drive for those of you who haven't yet purchased a second drive and are trying to decide which type of drive to buy.

For further information, contact :

Hayward Computer
426 Smalley Ave #1
Hayward, CA 94541
(415) 581-5516

END

pc-ditto - The Real Scoop *by pc-ditto creators Bill & Ginny Teal*

[Ed. note: This is a fairly long article, but given the significance of a real live MS-DOS emulator, I believe it merits the space. Our thanks to GENie & the Teals for allowing it to be reprinted.]

(Reprinted from GENie)

We would like to introduce ourselves: we are Avant-Garde Systems, manufacturer of pc-ditto for the Atari ST. The company is small, comprised of just two of us -- Ginny and Bill Teal.

First and most importantly, we wish to thank everyone who has supported us so far on just blind faith: dealers as well as consumers. In particular, we wish to say a special thanks to those on this message base who have carried the torch on our behalf until we could get here: Jeff Wimmer, Braun Tacon, Darek Mihoca(sp?) and a million thanks to Nevin Shalit in New York City.

Piracy -- We know that some rumors abound regarding the piracy of pc-ditto and the effect on Avant-Garde. We would like to go on record and eliminate any pesky rumors you've heard. A couple of weeks ago, we began to receive calls from dealers regarding piracy of our product. Not one or two, but in our phone log, now well over a hundred; fairly well scattered across the country. This might not seem unusual in this electronic age, but we were astounded by the sheer numbers of individuals who began contacting dealers and ourselves for support and disk drives. When we originally decided to enter the retail marketplace, we took into consideration that some piracy would occur. This, like similar vents in other industries, goes with the territory. But, it still hurt our feelings, after we tried to give the market a good product, at a

good price, a free update, and to offer to listen to the market so as to improve the product and service in the future.

So, are we going out of business or do we plan to roll over? No. Thank goodness for those of you who supported us. You have shown us that the entire Atari market is not corrupt. Only, that it sometimes seems so. If you continue your support, and your friends continue, then we will work even harder to earn your respect, to provide you the best support we can and keep all the promises we've made. Maybe, if by providing great support, more updates, and maintaining good prices, most people who want the product will ultimately want the real thing.

Support policy -- Please send in your registration cards. Many manufacturers tell us that only 20 to 30 percent of these cards are ever returned. We are providing a free update. This will be the only way we will know where and to whom to send an update. Also, if you call us, we can not help you if your card is not on file. Lastly, we are making the next update free, as a way to entice you to tell us what you think. The next update will contain enhancements, rather than bug fixes. But, we want your input. We do want the product to be useful to you. So, call, write, or send a message to us here.[GENie-Ed] About once a week we will visit this system, to reply to your questions. Usually, on Sunday. Since we view this medium as a technical support system, you may find that from time to time you ask us questions which we may not respond to. We will not give our opinion, speculate about the future, nor enter into debates of a non-technical nature publicly. Please send us E-mail, if you wish to cover other ancillary topics.

Because this system costs money, we want to save those who come here time and

aggravation, instead of covering a lot of irrelevant ifs, maybes, and should haves. It appears that this professional attitude is already in place here...we would just like to continue it. Thanks.

Finally, many of you may find it hard obtaining pc-ditto at your local dealer. We are working on this. We have one phone line. We are installing others. Also, we did not expect the overwhelming rush to buy this product. We had anticipated a slow summer in which to build up our credibility and advertise to dealers. Instead, you surprised us. Have patience. We won't forget you. By the way, our address is:

Avant-Garde Systems
381 Pablo Point Drive
Jacksonville, Florida 32225
(904) 221-2904

A dealer order number is coming shortly.

Design of pc-ditto:

1. The Atari monochrome monitor (which we refer to henceforth as the Black and white or B/W) is not supported in production release version 2.0. Please do not buy the system if you have only the B/W monitor; pc-ditto will not work. There has been some confusion over whether the documentation or the outside packaging is correct. The "requirements" on the outside back of the packaging is correct. The B/W monitor support will be included in the first update. We make no apologies for our initial decision. Unfortunately, this decision excludes about 20 percent of the U.S. market (according to Richard Frick and Sig Hartman at Atari). Quite simply, we did not have sufficient time and resources to implement and test the monitor. Do we want to exclude this market? No. We are probably losing money right now. But, any manufacturer has to weigh opportunity costs of decisions. Our cost was to not support B/W monitor, or delay announcement

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(pc ditto - cont.)

of the product by 3 to 6 months. We knew the window of opportunity for launching this product was this summer for both U.S. and European sales. Any later would most likely mean missing targets for advertising and promotions during the "back-to-school" and "Holiday season" buying periods. Approximately 40 percent of the microcomputer sales are made during these periods. That is why we officially state the B/W monitor support will be in the first update. Furthermore, we have been told by a major magazine reviewer regarding our product: we made the wisest decision. Had we chosen to initially support the B/W monitor, most people would have said "Ahhhh.Color is impossible." Instead, psychologically, implementing color makes people think B/W is simple. (Well, we wouldn't go quite as far as to say, simple. Just that it is about the same). In any case, there is one other rule we have about products. They are tested.

Should we prematurely release an untested product into the market, you would have to wait just about as long to get an update to fix it, should it be a disaster. We prefer your wrath now, and will work harder to recover your faith, when we release a solidly tested product. In the first instance, we destroy something we can never quite recover: your confidence in us and our product.

2. 80-track 5.25" drives -- not currently supported to read 40-track media (even if just to transfer data). We are working on a simple, utility which will get the job done under DOS. This will be out shortly. If enough need is voiced for this, we can always make a "hardware" switch, later.

3. Programs on our certified list -- my wife and I have limited financial resources. We tried to select DOS applications which have widespread appeal. Our most objective scorecard of the most popular programs is the list of top 40 IBM programs sold by the distributors: Softsel, Ingram, and Micro D.

We will continue to update this list about monthly; here, and with a list to dealers. If your favorite program is not here, that does not mean it will not work. But, like many compatibles, we are not perfect. (That's why we sell through dealers... so you can try before you buy). As we fix bugs and make other improvements, many non-working programs may start running. And, we appreciate all the calls you make regarding which do run. Please understand, our official list is only updated when we have tested the product ourselves. We make this policy because if you call with a problem, we can duplicate it (in most cases). For you to rely on someone else's word is less than professional for us, since we have to stand behind our product.

4. We never realized there would be such a debate over the poor little mouse. It certainly makes sense that if a mouse is attached, and free, that a product support it. Well, when we surveyed the market to determine what dealers and consumers wanted, we told "IBM PC XT compatibility." So, there is no mouse on a stock PC XT.

Two, most of the programs on the market directly do not support any mouse at all. What you will find is when you purchase a mouse, it will include two kinds of software: a mouse driver -- which knows how to talk to the mouse hardware; and applications interface software -- which is usually customized designed for the most popular applications, such as Lotus 1-2-3, and includes the pull-down menus, and the like. We intend to provide the driver. And, a generic mouse which generates cursor keystrokes, with maybe the right button to generate a user definable key (say, carriage return). Now, either will be selectable from our menu.

At this time, unless you already own IBM mouse interface software, from Microsoft, Logitech, Maynard, etc, then you may end up using Generic mouse. The cost of developing interface software is very large. Any one looking for a low cost market to develop for, here you are. Of

course, there are some public domain mice programs, such as PMM (poor mans mouse), available. We will keep you posted as we go.

5. There is no support for the European keyboards and timers yet. That version will be released to European distributors this summer.

6. The new blitter may help some screen updates, but we don't know. Little information about them, and the machines they will be supported on, is currently available.

7. Megs with 2 and 4 Meg memories, as well as upgraded 1.5 to 4Meg STs will be supported by pc-ditto.

8. Color text support -- One IBM CGA mode, 80 column text, permits 16 color backgrounds and 8 color characters. The Atari ST only supports 4 colors in 80 column mode. We DO allow you to choose which 4 colors. Unfortunately, this is one limitation placed on us by hardware design. However, we have not found this to be very limiting. Try it yourself, before discounting the ST. Also, the other CGA modes are supported fully. Therefore, there is no loss of graphic color or resolution capability.

Current BUGS-----

Current bugs we are working on are:

1. PC-DFMT doesn't always like to format a blank disk without error.

2. Hard disks partitioned sometimes indicate all logical drives assigned to partition 0. This is especially true of separate external drive/controller combinations.

3. Documentation: a. We refer to TOS system disks in the manual. We mean GEMDOS format disks. b. We refer to the Atari monochrome monitor in the manual. At the last minute, we left this in so we would not have to reprint the manual for an update. We do state on the outside package, however, that color monitor is currently required. c. There are minor typos in the Problem/solution section in the README.1st file.

4. Self-booting disks -- These are disks which require no (pc

ditto- cont.)

operating system to run. Generally, they are started using the CTRL-ALT-DEL key combination of rebooting pc-ditto. We perform a special check of the boot sector we start a disk with to ensure novice users have not left the GEMDOS disk in the A: drive accidentally. Unfortunately, as these things go, we look for a special IBM signature. To correct this, we will look for GEMDOS in the future. Please do not patch the system. You WILL cause irregularities in system operation, especially where disk writes occur.

Next Update Information -----

1. The next update to current owners of version 2.0 is FREE. Contrary to some nasty rumors that suggested otherwise.

2. The next update will be this Fall. Exactly when we do not know. As a policy, we announce products when they can be obtained right then. This is to prevent vaporware. For some of you, this may not seem soon enough. We are sorry. But, the software development road is littered with many dead bodies of consumers who relied on some vaporware date. Until someone can make an exact science out of the viscous art of software development, we are stuck with the frailties of the inestimable. Therefore, we will not lie.

3. Please, please, send those registration cards to us. Again, we do not know who you are without them. Consequently, we will not send you your update...which you deserve and have already paid for.

4. For dealers, we currently investigating how to do updates to help you get return customer traffic. Because of the piracy problem, and the fact that our product is not copy-protected, this is a very sticky situation. No matter what is resolved, you will be notified of updates, and your inventory replaced.

5. The reason for the FREE part of the update is two-fold. First, we don't believe in you paying us or bugs. If we did, we would have designed bugs into the system, marketed several add-on modules to fix different bugs, and

charged a lower price for the main product. We would like to treat you the way we want to be treated ourselves.

Second, we want to encourage you to let us know what enhancements will add value to your product. We are a consumer-oriented company. We do not invent technologies and foist them onto the public. Instead, we know that the way to continue sales is to improve the product and service to meet your needs. Sales only occur when needs are met. So.....what do you need? Don't be afraid to be absurd (though, don't just make things up either). We will review your needs. Implement those needs we can. If we can not, we will also tell you, and why. We are always looking for ways to improve our product. We're listening.

6. Topping the current list of needs are: B/W monitor support (selected for the next release) Mouse support -- Microsoft, Logitech, Maynard, Midi hardware support, Time/date carry over from the Atari GEM time/date.

Specific questions-----

1. Which single-sided 3.5" disk format to boot DOS from? Our utility, pc-dfmt, will not let you create a single-sided 80-track bootable DOS diskette, because the DOS you may be using could be lower than version 3.2. Thus, for DOS versions below 3.2, you may only create a 40-track single-sided bootable DOS diskette. You may, however, create 80-track data diskettes (containing no bootable DOS) for use under DOS versions below 3.2. See our user manual and README.1ST file for details. For DOS version 3.2, there is a simpler way to format high-capacity diskettes. You may also create bootable (that's right Bootable) 80-track single-sided DOS diskettes. This works for IBM and COMPAQ DOS versions. (For all other DOS makers, we haven't tested this). Create a Config.sys file containing the line:

DRIVPARM=/D:x/T:80/S:9/H:1

(replace x with a 0 or 1 depending on which physical drive is 3.5", 0 is

a: 1 is b:) Now, using the DOS FORMAT command, you can create the SS 80-track disk, optionally bootable with DOS.

2. Can't Avant-Garde find a way to override the DOS drives to reduce the confusion regarding device drivers with various letter assignments? Unfortunately, our job is to act like hardware. Once we begin to take over the functions of the DOS, we lose the compatibility and would probably introduce complexities in other areas. However, if you think you know the answer, let us know. Thanks.

3. Can't Avant-Garde make the creation of the CONFIG.SYS and the formatting more automatic, say by using batch files? Maybe. We'll look into it. Everyone's hardware is so different, making a general purpose utility to accomplish this may still be quite a task. Any DOS programmers out there up to the challenge? (How about a DOS shell?) This is perhaps why many of you, inexperienced with DOS, may find that the GEM environment is so much easier to use. The command line approach to running a microcomputer is difficult and often ambiguous. Add to that the evolution of new hardware, even as simple as 3.5" drives, and some systems seem to be very poorly designed to handle it, without extreme contortions on the part of the operator. Anyway, we're looking into some sort of simplification.

4. Isn't there some way to improve the creation of 3.5" 720K disks? This is a problem inherent in the design of DOS. We will try to find the simplest and best way to create them. Let us hear your success tips. Maybe we can come up with the all around best "cookbook" rules to handle DOS formats.

[As of this printing, pc-ditto is available locally through both Computability and Mayfair Computers for under \$90.00. I think it goes without saying that based on the amount of work done and support shown by the authors, these people deserve our support. -Ed.]

Are The 8-bits In Trouble ? We Loves Them, We Loves Them Not

By Bob Woolley

One of the best things about being an editor for the Journal is that I get to read all the Exchange newsletters from around the country. Collectively, they contain everything you could ever want to read about the world of Atari. No detail is left out. No stone is unturned. No roomer too uncertain. Sometimes, the stones are turned many times over - 46 reports of the CES, 86 columns on the demise of BI.

Which brings me to the subject of this article - loss of support for the 8-bits/death of the old 8-bits/lack of 8-bit software/..... I just read a piece in *The Pokey Press* that chronicled the author's transistion from an 800 to an ST. Although the writer did not intend to completely retire the trusty old 8-bit, he was drawn to abandon his 800 by the sheer power and utility of the ST programs. He writes: "With a software line-up like I had available to me on the ST, what possible reason could I have to boot up my 800?" and "When it came to word-processing, Wordwriter ST,, beat the living hell out of anything available for the 8-bit ..." with ".... Flash was clearly superior to anything I'd used on the 8-bit (including my old family servant, Express...)". Ken White, the author, continues his column with the observation that the door is slowly closing on the 8-bits as it had on the relics of the early years of computing: "Of course, the 8-bit Atari line will, one day, be a fond memory to everyone. Just like the Exidy Sorcerer and the

Altos" and " a machine with 4K of memory and a tape drive was one, day the 'cutting edge' of personal computing, that day was a lotta yesterdays ago."

That's funny. I have an old 8-bit and an ST set up side-by-side in my computer room. I also have Flash for my ST and Express for my 800XL. But, the ST is the one collecting dust in my house. When it comes to word processing, 80 columns or 800 columns (I only print 60 on an 8 1/2 inch form, anyway), out comes the old AtariWriter cartridge. Flash is probably a great program, but the data still comes over the phone line at 1200 baud and I still only type with two fingers, so I use Express on my "relic". Why? Am I just stubborn, or is there a valid reason why my 8-bit will always be the machine of choice, other than the cost of purchasing all new software and learning all new programs? Certainly, I use the ST, but only for things that can't be done well on the 8-bits - like Publishing Partner and Easy Draw. Everything else seems to default to the XL.

The first indication of this trend was the response that I got when I inquired about a disk editor and useful utilities for my new ST. I am sure that they exist, probably in Public Domain, but not commercially. The computer store where I bought my ST had a whole wall of ST software, but little of what I sought. Such a poor selection indicates very little user interest in buying software dedicated to these primary functions. Likewise, a memory map does not seem to be a favorite purchase for ST owners,

Loves Them? continued

either. In fact, the software offerings for the ST seem to target only the user or the advanced programmer. Little seems to interest those that would like to program their own systems. At this point, I would like to speculate about the flaw in Ken White's (and 800,00 others') reasoning - the ST and AMIGA style machines are not an advancement in the field of personal computing. They are much too complex to be grasped by the casual user to be effective for the personal computer owner.

Computers came into existence about 40 years ago. Programmable calculators capable of logical comparisons, in themselves, could not accomplish as much as your average can opener without the stored program that someone had to create. Once the program is operating, then the system became a can opener, or whatever. This is where I would like to make the division between a computer and a Multi-Dimensional Electronic Device. A computer can be programmed by the average user - an MDED cannot. A good example of an MDED is the 2600 game system. PONG was an electronic device - fixed forever at the time of manufacture. The 2600 Atari was an MDED - taking the configuration of whatever cartridge was inserted. This was a VAST improvement over fixed program devices, but it was NOT a computer. You had no way to do your own thing on it. A similar circumstance existed in the world of computers at that time. You could have your own terminal that hooked up to the mainframe and play ZORK on your "computer", but unless you were a wizard, you had no chance to program the beast. Enter the personal computer.... (did you know that the Atari 800 was named the Atari 800 Personal Computer

when it came out?). This development is a major branch in the general scheme of electronics. Now, the user can actually program a calculating, decision making electronic device for the first time. I agree with Ken in that the early machines were destined to be replaced by equipment with more memory, disk drives and an improved operating system, graphics and user interface. All these features make programming your personal computer much easier and productive. My 8-bit is light-years ahead of an Exidy or IMSAI. But, is the ST?

If you follow the 2600 (MDED) branch of consumer products, you will find that this genre of products has been totally overlaid with personal computers of one sort or another. Dedicated word processors, graphics stations, music systems - all sorts of MDED electronic products have been absorbed. But this is not personal computing. You are totally at the mercy of those who wrote the original program - No reasonable path exists for you to build on what they have done, or change the way they have done it. In fact, many of the higher powered MDED programs have been developed so that the user can configure it to his needs - even arrange the order of execution of the modules! A programmable MDED!! Funny, how the market seems to prefer such products ...

Now, granted, you could change the programming of a 2600 if you really wanted to. You could re-do the circuitry inside your PONG, too. But, they are not programmable. Is the ST programmable? For a professional programmer, the ST must be fantastic. One of the reasons that less 8-bit software is available is the fact that all the commercial programmers that would write for the 8's ran out and got an ST. No question

about the rationale behind that move, but can we draw the conclusion that the 8-bit is dead? These guys are not writing software for their own use. Would they all run to buy an ST if all they wrote was PD stuff for their friends? The question is: does the ST improve your ability to control your personal computer or do your own thing? Even at less cost, it makes no sense to 'move up' to a system with less utility. As an MDED - no question; if you have the application, use the ST MDED - it is the best system available. It will be surpassed in the near future by even better products, but it is on top of the heap now. As for programming the thing, I seem to draw a joker.

Back to my use of AtariWriter, I find that I can work with the raw data from it's files easily. The format is simple and well defined. The program itself has just about any feature that I am willing to use. As an example, I have the THUNDER spelling checker for my ST. I could use it while I type PPart text to check my spelling. I don't. It isn't worth my time to learn how to use the thing just to do proofreading. The word 'roomer' in the first paragraph would probably go through without a hitch, which means I have to review the text myself, anyway. When I bought my ST, I looked for personal computing stuff - source code, sector editors, disassemblers and like that. I certainly had little interest in a copy of MoonMist. I can get that on my 8-bit (and if I can't, I can get something similar). I will certainly buy MDED products for my 8-bit, but I am not limited to them. Ace-Crack Pascal at \$150 is not my idea of a personal computer users language. I want Basic. So does everyone else that wants to use his computer for personal use. I also want to understand my hardware and how the operating system uses it. Like how to make the joystick inputs into outputs and how to turn the screen upside down (that may seem silly, but if the hardware exists to execute such a routine, I would like the documentation). The features in the 8-bits over the early personal computers made it much easier for the novice owner to use as a personal computer. The 'advances'

incorporated into the ST make it a better MDED, but not a better personal computer. If I want a simple program to change the CompuServe line feed - carriage return into a CHR\$(155) character, I can write it myself. I can access the data. I can also download a program that someone else wrote to do the same thing. Look at the Disk Library program that is floating all over the country. I'll bet hundreds of people have modified the original to suit their own purposes. Most of the modifications are also available for me to make use of.

Sure, the ST may be a better 2600, but I don't think it will replace my 8-bit. I doubt that the 32-bit systems will be any better in that respect, either. Look at it this way, most of us would trade their 1951 Ford for a 1978 model, but how many of us would give up their car to buy an airplane?



MEETING MINUTES

by Rolly Herman

The meeting was called to order by Pres. Dom Minnitte at 8:15.

It was announced by the president that our Sec/Treas. John Palmer has moved to upstate New York and has, therefore, resigned his office. Rolly Herman was elected to fill the opening of Sec/Treas. for the rest of this year.

The minutes were accepted as published in the W.A.N.D.

No scheduled program was arranged for this meeting because no one has volunteered to present anything.

Henry Jacoby carried on a heated diatribe about the editorial on thievery in the W.A.N.D.

A beginners' SIG will be held at Dominic Minnitte's home on Thurs. Sept. 17 at 7:30 PM.

David Sorkin volunteered to demonstrate his method of modifying DUP.SYS using AtariWriter Plus at the next meeting.

Rolly Herman held our raffle of MATH BLASTER, and DiMaria sold blank disks. The club netted \$49.00.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45.

Henry Jacoby gave a brief demo of BBKART from the new ANALOG disk.<>

WHITHER THE 8-BIT ATARI?

by Michael V. Sharp

Over the past year we have worried and watched and heard many cries of anguish as third party software support has swung from 8-bit to 16-bit computers. Many have left their 8-bits for the ST. Others have switched brands. Some just sit and gripe.

Now that CES and COMDEX are history, the usual flurry of magazine articles has appeared to analyze both shows and predict the near future of the personal computer industry. Based on what we see, I think we can draw some conclusions about the future of the 8-bit Atari.

Let's start with some observations:

1. Change, particularly positive change has been a fact of life for a long time. The rate of change, particularly in areas of emerging technology, is increasing. The personal computer industry is in one of those areas of emerging technology. Nowhere is this high rate of change more apparent than at trade shows like CES and COMDEX, where vendors tout their latest accomplishments.

2. 16-bit computers really are more capable than 8-bit computers. That's why they were developed, and that's why development continues on 32-bit computers, which will be more powerful than 16-bit machines. Six to nine months ago, as the new 16-bit machines were just coming to market, applications software was scant -- just enough to get 16-bit users into basic computer applications. Now each new trade show features some attention-grabbing display which shows off extended 16-bit power.

3. Hardware and software development emphasis has swung to the 16-bit machines, not only Atari, but other brands as well. Moreover, what third party, 8-bit software development there is, avoids supporting Atari -- probably because Atari software piracy has seriously eroded that corner of the market. Perusal of new 8-bit software offerings reveals Atari's conspicuous absence among supported systems.

4. The 8-bit Atari user still has an abundance of commercial and public domain software applications from which to choose. Third party hardware and software development continues, but on a different basis of availability than before -- abundant software support is still available via mail order, and on BBS's. There is now a stable of standard applications software for the Atari 8-bits. Some hardware development from Atari and companies like ICD continues to expand the machine's capability. In June we saw Atari bring its 80-column board to market, announce a new true double density 5.25" disk drive to replace the 1050, and abandon plans for a 3.5" drive.

5. Atari Corporation is pushing its 8-bit systems more as game machines than computers, because they see a resurgence of the game machine market. But we know that at its heart, the 8-bit "game machine" is still an 8-bit computer, don't we? And what should we see, but that Atari is converting many old games to cartridges to make sure that the new "game machine" buyers will have enough to keep them busy. Well my goodness! It looks as though all those game cartridges will work on our "computers" too.

Based on these observations of computer reality (admittedly my

own), we can draw some conclusions:

1. The 8-bit Atari is going to be around for some time to come. Although its installed base may not be as large as that of the Commodore-64, Apple IIX, or IBM PC, nevertheless it constitutes a substantial market segment that for the time being, Atari will continue to recognize.

2. If you need to get into Computer-Aided Design, or desktop publishing, then by all means, sell your 8-bit system and go buy an ST (or Amiga, or Macintosh, or IBM, or ...)

3. If the present stable of Atari software applications isn't enough for you, and you need to see a continual stream of new programs for your computer, then sell your Atari system, and go buy a Commodore-64, Apple IIX, or IBM-clone.

4. If you need to write letters/reports/books, keep track of your budget and household inventory, play an occasional game, and do some programming, then be happy with your 8-bit Atari. Kiss it and say you love it, and go forth and produce (or play, or program, or ...)! In other words, don't panic at the thought of having to live without support for your 8-bit computer system. You won't have to. Just realize that the scene is going to change a little. You'll probably be buying more from mail order firms and small development houses. You'll probably be running "game machine" cartridges on your "computer," even though you know that you don't have a true "game machine." You'll probably be spending more time on BBS's and national information services, like CompuServe and Genie. And you may even be attending your local user group a little more regularly. Now that's not so bad, is it?

What will it be? ST or XE

Paul Machiaverna - JACG

Being a user for over four years, I have seen a lot of changes in the computers produced by the company called Atari. I bought an 800 in February of 1983, a 130XE in August of 1985, and a 520ST in December of 1985. I still own all three machines (the 800 is for sale, though). I must admit that there are things I like better about the 8 bit machines and things I like better about the ST machines. I joined the JACG only a few short months ago and have been amazed at the puns which are thrown between the 8 and 16 bit Atari owners. I find myself defending both machines, depending upon to whom I am talking! When I talk to an ST owner, I defend the 8 bits. When I talk to an 8 bit owner, I defend the ST. And when I speak to a non-Atari user, I defend all of Atari! I just want to give some views on the two completely different lines of computers Atari has to offer. The specs, the ads, the opinions of users, and the puns made at the meetings can be a very confusing and frustrating experience to the potential Atari computer buyer or to those who bought one and asks themselves, "Did I make the right choice between an ST and XE?" So, I hope to ease up some of the tension by simply telling you what I have found that I like better or worse of both machines.

First, let's talk about the 8 bit computers. When I bought my 800, I immediately realized just what an incredible machine it really was and still is, despite the popular view that it was a game machine in a computer's clothes. I learned to work with computers on an old Apple II+. What a nightmare that was! Applesoft BASIC is still the worst dialect of BASIC I have ever used. The Apple was way over-priced, and price of it's software was ridiculous. When I checked out the Atari 800 I saw that it was a workhorse. Terrific graphics and sound did impress me, but there was a lot more there. The 8 bit Ataris are very easy to program with respect to many other computers and, because I was still new to computers, that was a very important point. I used the 800 for about two and a half years. In that time I had used Atari & Atari Microsoft BASIC over and over again to write programs to solve problems in my college major, electronic engineering. I wrote all my reports with Atariwriter, and after a tough day of studying I could boot up 'Miner 2049'er' and have fun. My being very into the field of electronics and after taking a few EE courses in college, I had the idea of designing and building hardware projects to connect to my Atari. The 800 served my early projects by simply connecting them to the joystick ports. But, I read about the power of using the parallel bus on the newer XL and XE computers. When I decided to buy an 800XL, I saw a new kid in town (actually in Gemini!), the

130XE. Hear was a 128K machine with a greatly sleeked down look, the parallel bus exposed, and a beautiful price. From the first time I disconnected my 800 from the I/O daisychain and put the 130XE in it's place I was hooked! No more loading in Atari DOS or MYDOS from disk simple disk directory. Just let the RAMDisk hold the DUP.SYS and I had it made. The Happy Enhancement does a sector copy in one simple pass. And, software vendors, such as Xlent, showed just how valuable the extra memory was to applications. Plus, I really like the totally redesigned keyboard of the XE. What else could I want from the Atari corporation.

Enter the Atari ST computers. During the summer of 1985, the pages of Analog, Antic, and COMPUTE! were all talking about the new and incredible Atari computers on the way to the market. Those were, of course, the 250ST and the 520ST. The 250ST who? Yeah! You know! The vapor computer! I eagerly read all the information on the STs; the specs, the graphics, the speed, the power! Finally, the machines hit the stores and I was able to see it in action. The lack of software was a little discouraging, but I saw once again that Atari had I winner on it's hands. The ST includes standard ports for both a printer and an RS-232 device (Modem). On the 8 bits I was forced to buy the very expensive 850 for either I/O capability. I started to get interested in using a computer as a tool for creating CAD quality drawings and I saw that a couple of such software products were needed. I waited until the programs reached the market, then I bought the 520ST.

To try to wrap all of this history together, I now summarize what exactly I use each computer for in my daily use. I don't really use my 800 anymore. I wish to sell it so I can use the money towards a hard drive for my ST. I use my 130XE for all my BASIC programming, create a newsletter for my place of work using Typesetter 130XE, and I have interfaced it to a model railroad via a custom hardware project. I am yet to find a better BASIC than BASIC XE by OSS. It follows some of structure of PASCAL and is extremely fast. Typesetter 130XE is a great program for creating printware. The resolution of the hardcopies is incredible. I can take pictures from ComputerEyes and put them onto a page for a newsletter. I am able to utilize the expansion bus to yield more data bits than possible with the 800.

As for the 520ST, I have upgraded it to 1 Meg RAM, installed the TOS ROMS, and a clock/calendar chip. I use CAD programs for creating beautiful schematics and printed circuit boards for my hardware projects. Word processing is much easier due to the more advanced wordprocessors and the 80 column character screen. I used my homecomputer more than ever because I needed a really 'good' word processor (Personal Pascal by OSS) for my programming classes, and I was able to make professional quality drawings for my reports in college. The price versus performance ratio of ST software is incredible.

Relatively low priced software does a lot for you. The software on the ST is very fast and powerful for my uses. In contrast to other similar computers, Amiga & Mac, the ST gives a lot of power for a low price. The hardware peripherals are also kept at a low price. Plus, you don't need any special interfaces to connect your printer or modem.

What don't I like about the machines? My biggest gripes about the 8 bits are, a) no 80 column screen (sorry, bit-3 and others are horrible to my eyes!), b) no standard ports for non-Atari peripherals, c) software has slowed to a trickle and d) more advanced software applications (CAD) are either too slow to use or simply not possible. On the ST, my biggest gripes are, a) Atari can't seem to decide what is to be called a 'complete' ST (TOS ROMS change without notice, the Blitter chip is still vaporware, and Atari is giving the developers a hard time (68000)), b) difficult to interface hardware to the machine, and c) difficult to program the graphics capabilities, especially when compared to the 8 bits and their easy to use Antic video microprocessor.

So, what do I suggest you do? Think it over carefully between both machines if you are in the market to buy one. Have a clear and concise idea as to what you want and need a computer to do for you. Then compare the software capabilities and the price versus performance you can expect. Above all, talk to members of the JACS and try to get unbiased opinions about the machines. As far as us present Atari users are concerned, we must have bought the Atari machine which we felt was right for our uses. So, let's not waste anymore time on trying to show up each others machines and just simply keep at using or programming the finest in microcomputers, Ataris!



MEETING NOTICE

Our meetings are usually held on the first Thursday evening of each month. Therefore, the next meeting will be on Thursday, October 1, 1987 at 8:00 PM at 100 High Point Drive, Hartsdale, NY. in the recreation room on the ground floor. Tell the guard that you are attending the Atari meeting. When you come into building 100, press the Black button for the guard to open the inner door. For travelling directions call Henry Jacoby at 914-761-8664.

The club has expanded its public domain library. We expect Henry Jacoby to have new disks for sale. They should be available at the October meeting. Be sure to attend and purchase your copies.<>

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dr. Roland B. Herman ... 914-946-4134

Advertising Manager

John Palmer 914-939-7965

The Atari Users' Group
of Westchester
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Dr. Herman Silver ... 914-948-8787

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The W.A.N.D.
4 Charlotte St.
White Plains, NY
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